August 14, 1970

Professor Wally G. Cochran
Department of Statistics
Harvard University
2 Divinity Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear Professor Cochran:

Thank you for your courtesy in considering the tiresome problem which I am about to broach to you.

Jerzy Neyman first suggested, and John Tukey agreed, that it might be useful to explore the possibility of having ISI provide a forum for a current discussion of the tobacco and health issue. I take this opportunity to provide you with the information which might be useful for the Bureau in considering this suggestion.

For many reasons, a situation has been reached in which open review of the health issue relating to tobacco may be indicated but not easily accomplished. (While it seems, offhand, that the public nature of scientific data and the opportunities to review are "inalienable" rights, the recent story of tobacco and health may show that this is just not so.) I include a set of my Comments which would make it appear that sufficient conflicting evidence and problems exist to warrant a reexamination of this issue. The political climate that seems to exist makes questioning smoking and health data by individuals inadvisable, and it may be impossible to obtain a proper hearing for dissenting views regardless of how well they may be substantiated.

On the basis of an evaluation done by Washington University some two years ago, it would appear that this problem needs to be attacked on as broad a base and as publicly as possible to assure a hearing for its findings. Again, you will find enclosed with this letter the final report of an advisory committee that dealt with precisely that issue.

I am not so sure that the ISI would have the facilities to actually work with existing data. Rather, I should think that a consortium of universities is required to accomplish the detailed inspection and analysis. A committee of ISI would provide the authoritative direction for what work is to be undertaken and furnish the forum for discussion and for dissemination of whatever conclusions the review of data may lead to. Would it be possible to develop such a review body with the aid of ISI?

Jerzy Neyman suggested that some airing of the issue be attempted at the forthcoming Washington meeting. I shall discuss this matter with Dr. Hanson. However, I thought it might be well if you were advised of that also in the event the Bureau might want to consider the possibility of having an open discussion panel devoted to this issue.

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I would also appreciate it if you could advise me of some alternatives by which a proper review forum may be constituted. For instance, would ISI be more willing to participate in forming such a forum if it were done with the cooperation of another group such as AAAS? Needless to say, any advice in this matter will be most welcome.

I plan to be in Holland sometime between September 11 and 16. Perhaps it would be possible for me to discuss this matter with the staff of ISI? (Although I shall leave this country at the end of August, I can always be reached through my secretary.)

Needless to say, I wish you a pleasant trip and hope that I shall have an opportunity to meet with you in the near future.

Sincerely yours,

Theodor D. Sterling
Professor

TDS:hk
Enclosures

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